

Rangammal Memorial Rehabilitation Society

The Rangammal Memorial Hospital & The Rangammal Memorial School for the Hearing-Impaired. Registered Charity No. 67/91

Sambanthanur Village, Somasipadi Post, Tiruvannamalai 606 611, India



In 1985 Sylvia Wright founded the Rangammal Memorial Hospital, which is situated off the Pradakshina road around Mount Arunachala; and in 1992 she founded the Rangammal Memorial School for the Hearing-Impaired, which is situated just off the Madras road some 8km. from the centre of Tiruvannamalai.

I travelled to the school for the first time in November 1999 and was immediately overwhelmed by the happy atmosphere there; the healthy smiling faces of the children and the staff who take care of them pays true testimony to this excellent endeavour, and serves to emphasise the heartfelt dedication of all who are involved in this wonderful effort. During further visits I became convinced that the school and hospital deserve as much support as it is possible to obtain - hence these pages.



Sylvia Wright with
H.M. Queen Elizabeth II

Neither project receives its primary financial support from the Indian Government and they rely almost entirely upon a small group of dedicated fund raisers based in Leeds, West Yorkshire, England. These friends raise approximately £65,000 annually and send the entire amount to the Trust on a monthly basis. Help also comes from local philanthropists, plus a small amount per pupil from the local government. both institutions are impressive considering the low funding. Staff are paid excellent salaries by the Trust and there is a long waiting list for employment vacancies at both establishments. The Trust has now started a drive to eradicate TB in the local area through education and treatment. It also funds AIDS testing and gives free treatment where necessary.

In 1997, during her visit to India, H.M. Queen Elizabeth II awarded the M.B.E. to Sylvia Wright in recognition of the dedication and achievements that have been made in both projects. This says more than any number of pictures or thousands of words. In the following pages Sylvia Wright sets out the background and history of the Trust, complete with photographs of the children, in class, at work and at play.



The first day of the School in 1992. This school has
now moved and expanded to care for 200 children.



The Rangammal Memorial School today

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I came to India in 1981 in response to our Lord's call to "Go, sell all that you have, give it to the poor and follow Me".

Prior to this I had wide experience, and held senior positions in administration and teaching in both the hospital and community health fields. Later I worked as a senior lecturer in what is now the Metropolitan University of Leeds, with a responsibility for Paediatrics and Community Health.

In 1981 there was little health care provision in Tiruvannamalai or the villages in Tiruvannamalai district. I therefore purchased a van, equipped it with the necessary items to run clinics in the villages, trained five local people in basic health care and set up clinics in six villages, widely spaced but within one hours drive of the town. We visited each village one day per week, giving care, health education, instruction on the prevention of disease and early detection of illness and deformity. We gave antenatal care and trained women in hygiene, nutrition and the methodology of administering medicine; we also trained them in the application of sterile dressings and in follow-up care for those already seen in the clinics. Many of these women were later absorbed into government schemes.

The clinics proved very popular and we saw up to 400 patients daily. A token payment of Rs. 2.00 (about 5 pence at that time) was paid by each patient. All medication, etc. was given free. Soon Indian doctors joined us and the work progressed steadily.

It soon became clear that we needed a 'back up' hospital, especially for cases of malnutrition amongst the children, a problem that was rife at that time. Accordingly, in 1985, a small twelve-bed hospital was built on land leased to us by a local religious order for that purpose.



Rangammal Memorial Hospital

Although the hospital was originally meant only for children, adults also requested this facility; gradually additional wards were added in a rather piecemeal fashion, as need dictated, and finance permitted.

The hospital now has 150 beds and specialises in Paediatrics, Gynaecology, Orthopaedics, General Surgery and General Medicine, which includes Diabetes and a Cardiac ICU together with the necessary backup services such as X-ray, ECG, Cardiac Monitors, Ultrasound facilities, plus a fully equipped Laboratory and Pharmacy.

All services are offered at very minimal rates according to our finances. The hospital is meant to cater for the poor, so really needy patients are treated free of cost and we are negotiating with a local philanthropist to provide fifty beds entirely free of cost for children, the elderly and those without support of any kind, in other words, all patients who may be unable to pay even our very limited charges. All patients receive three nutritious meals per day free of cost, as most are suffering from malnutrition in varying degrees in addition to their presenting symptoms.



St Francis of Assisi - the statue that greets you as you enter the school



Children on field trip to Sathainur dam



Boys learning pottery-making skills



Boys enjoying swimming on a field trip

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We already provide free care for those in real need, but it will be a great boon to our patients if we are able to do so on a regular basis. The fact that we are able to do so much is due to the generosity and dedication of a group of friends of mine in the UK who formed the *Sylvia Wright Trust* in the early 1980's. We now have a network of supporters mostly in the UK who have regularly sent money through the Trust for all these years.

I have worked for all these years without salary, doing the jobs of Director, Nursing Superintendent, Medical Superintendent (alongside senior Doctors) and Chief Administrator, in order to ensure that all the money sent to us goes directly to the sick and the handicapped. In this way administrative costs are kept to a minimum and all money goes directly to the patients or our other social services.

Because our in-patient work has grown (we have nearly 100% bed occupancy rates) and we see between five and six thousand out-patients per month I was unable to continue with our village works; this has been gradually reduced to one village clinic per week. Over the last decade the government Health Services have opened many Primary Health Centres in major villages and introduced village Health Workers. I therefore felt that the real need for the area was high-quality in-patient care for the poor, hence our present concentration on hospital work. I also feel, especially with my limited resources, that *Non-Government Organisations* (NGO's) should complement and not duplicate or compete with government works.

In 1991 I was approached by the District Rehabilitation Officer, and asked if I could open a school for hearing-impaired children, as this was a comparatively common disability in this area, due mainly, it was felt, to the high rate of consanguineous marriage. There was no provision of any kind for such children and they were growing up illiterate and rejected by both their families and society.

Accordingly, I rented a house in Tiruvannamalai and took thirty-two children with profound hearing-loss as school boarders. The numbers have now grown to 170 children (from a population of about 100,000). In 1996, due to the generosity of the *Sylvia Wright Trust* and a matching grant from the EU we were able to build a



The boys dormitory at the school



Boys enjoying swimming on a field trip



Agricultural training



Arts and Crafts classes

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purpose-built school and hostel on land donated by one of our Indian Board-Members. The Board is made up of social-minded citizens of Tiruvannamalai who serve in a voluntary capacity. It is a registered charity as stated previously. This was done in order to ensure full interest and co-operation from the local community. The Board Members are of all Castes and Religious backgrounds.

The school gives free education, board and lodging, uniforms, education materials, etc., as all of the children are from very poor socio-economic backgrounds and their parents, for the most part, are not in a position to contribute. All of the teachers are trained in educating the deaf; the class size is kept to a maximum of ten children and modern teaching aids and techniques are provided.

The children are educated up to the tenth standard according to their intellectual ability. Many extra-curricular activities, Guides, Scouts, dancing, sports, competitions, inter-school matches and a variety of games, etc. are encouraged; maternal reflective method and joyful learning techniques are followed, which has won the admiration of local school principals. The school is recognised by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Tiruvannamalai is situated in a rural part of India; it is designated a District Headquarters town (Collectorate) and is surrounded by many villages of various sizes. There is no appreciable industrial development and the main source of livelihood for the people is subsistence agriculture. Most are employed as day-labourers with a consequent high rate of unemployment and under-employment. The employment prospects for anyone with a handicap of any kind, or with 'special needs' as current jargon has it, are very bleak to say the least. As there is no such thing as unemployment benefit or social assistance the economic burden on the family is great.

With this in mind, we realised that we might be doing an actual disservice to our young people if we sent them out of our school without any employment skills to enable them to earn a living. We therefore opened a Vocational Training Centre, where trades and skills are taught that are compatible with the young persons mental and physical abilities and interest.



Opening the School Bank



Pupils performing the butterfly dance on Indian television

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We offer computer skills (which are introduced from the fifth standard), tailoring, embroidery, electrical skills, plumbing, horticulture, agriculture, dairy work and Arts and Crafts.

The children spend two years here after completing their education, learning to survive in a competitive world. On leaving the school help will be given to set up their own cottage industry or to find employment for the brighter students. We are liaising with a local Engineering College in order to devise a software programme which will help to develop learning opportunities for the profoundly deaf child.

However, despite all of our efforts, many children will find it difficult to obtain gainful employment and thereby independence and self-reliance. With this in mind we have started another venture, a type of sheltered-workshop, where the great majority of employees will be either physically, or even marginally mentally handicapped. This we plan to run as a commercial venture, paying an acceptable level of salary to the staff and ploughing the profits back into the development of the unit.



Some of the senior pupils performing a traditional Indian dance for visiting friends.



Our final venture up to this date, is with the grossly mentally-handicapped; these unfortunate children are unable to benefit from education or training. In India, with a very high proportion of people relying on subsistence wages, such children are an intolerable financial burden in addition to the mental and emotional distress experienced by the parents.

Bearing this in mind, we have devised a scheme where a type of care-allowance is given to the guardian on a monthly basis, with a bank account opened in the child's name. Monthly medical checks are carried out and the child is given free in-patient and out-patient treatment, if necessary. Clothing is given twice annually at the main Hindu festivals.

This scheme has been a great boon to the families, and from first being seen as an economic burden the child is now cared for as a contributing member of the family with a bank account in its own name (probably the only one in the family). This has resulted in better care for the child and a happier home atmosphere.



Bath-time for the small children, helped by an older pupils

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Children in the 1st Standard class



Computer classes for senior pupils



Computer and typewriting classes for senior pupils



Lunch time at the school



Dress-making classes at the school

In 1997 I had the great honour of receiving the MBE from Her Majesty the Queen, here in India. It was given in recognition of the work done, but this of course was only possible through the regular financial support I have received.

Enabling and encouraging others in their desire to lead independent and fruitful lives is both a privilege and a responsibility for those whose life-chances have been somewhat fortunate.

To my mind, any excess money we may have is given to us on trust to be used for those less fortunate than ourselves.

I have been in India for nineteen years and have come to know and love it well. India is a land of stark contrasts. The people for the most part have a natural spirituality and are devout in their religious practices. Unfortunately this can lead, as we see in many parts of the world, to conflict, division and even murder and mutilation, all in the name of religion. In our organisation we respect the religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds of everyone. Hindus of all castes, Muslims and Christians work together in harmony and mutual respect. I am very grateful for this. In our 'community' of patients, children and staff, we number about five hundred and fifty people at any one time. This is small microcosm of the world population, I know, but the fact that we can live so harmoniously is indicative of what it is possible to achieve when the motive of service to others is of greater importance than service to self.

Sylvia Wright, Rangammal Memorial Trust

More School Photographs

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Top and middle left: Rangammal School Girl Guides group.

Bottom left and below: Bathing at the waterfalls during a school field trip. Field trips are part of the extra-curricular activities of the school. The children are encouraged to take part in as many activities as possible to broaden their horizons far beyond anything they could normally expect from traditional village life.



Top right: Girls from the school at the waterfalls during a field trip.

Middle right: Pottery-making training for the girls on a field trip.

Bottom right: Children learning traditional leaf-painting for use on greetings cards. Examples of these cards can be seen on the 'School Products' pages that follow this section.



More School Photographs

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Top left: Morning assembly and prayers at the school.



Middle left: Morning exercise for the children; all of the children take part in this.



Bottom left: A social studies class in a local village.

Below: Sylvia Wright giving a prize to one of the girls. Prize-giving is a traditional incentive in Indian schools and it brings results.



Top right: The senior girls dancing at a school function. They are truly captivating to watch.



Middle right: The dancers receiving prizes for their skill and performance.

Bottom right: More prize-giving for exam passes.



More School Photographs

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Top left: The school pupils parading during the annual Red-Cross day. All of the schools take part in this parade.



Middle left: Pupils photographed in the gardens at the school. Despite warnings that nothing much would grow in the soil around the school, Sylvia Wright went ahead and planted every variety of fruit tree, vegetable, spice bush, herbs and ornamental plants - all have prospered to the amazement of everyone.



Bottom left: Tailoring classes for the girls. They make dresses for all of the pupils and for general sale to the public through the school shop.



Top right: Vocational training for the boys. They are taught the skills that will enable them to get work locally - electrical skills, plumbing, general mechanical skills, woodworking and metal bashing.



Middle right: Greetings-card manufacture at the school. The output of the embroidery class and the leaf-painting class are glued to greetings cards for sale to the public.



Bottom right: The school's products on display.

Rangammal School Products

S. V. Products

A unit of the Rangammal Memorial School for the
Hearing-Impaired,

Sampanthanur Village. Somasipadi Post, Tiruvannamalai,
Tamil Nadu 606 611, South India.

Telephone: (0091) (0)4175 22060

High-quality hand-painted greetings cards

The traditional Indian craft of leaf-painting is employed here to create greetings cards for all occasions. After painting, the leaf is glued to a card with traditional greetings messages inside. These cards are priced at 80 pence (UK) and represent good value for money.

Our brochure contains 15 different designs of leaf-painting, some of which are shown here, but we can produce any design that you require.



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High-quality hand-embroidered greetings cards

Hand-embroidered cloth is used here to create greetings cards for all occasions. The cloth is glued to a card with traditional greetings messages inside. These cards are priced at 75 and 100 pence (UK) and represent excellent value for money.

Our brochure contains 9 different designs, some of which are shown here, but we can produce any design that you require.



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Telephone: (0091) (0)4175 22060

High-quality hand-crafted greetings cards

Here flowers, leaves and painting are used to create unique greetings cards for all occasions. The brightly coloured flowers and leaves are glued to a card with traditional greetings messages inside. These cards are priced at 80 pence (UK) and represent excellent value for money.

Our brochure contains 6 different designs, some of which are shown here, but we can produce any design that you require.



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How You Can Help

Products and Markets:

The pupils at the school are trained in the traditional Indian crafts of leaf-painting (for greetings cards), embroidery, bead-making, dress-making and other basic crafts. The disabilities of these children do not limit their ability to make things to a high standard. On the contrary, these children put Western workers to shame, they are diligent, enthusiastic and ever anxious to learn more.

What the school requires more than anything else is markets for the products that the children make; especially for the craft workshops output. The products shown on these web pages are not the whole story; the school is more than willing to undertake specific requirements in any of the fields it covers, including highly complex embroidery.

If you can help in any way to generate orders for the school or to find markets for the products, then please do so. You can contact the school direct or go through the Sylvia Wright Trust in England.

Donations:

The Rangammal Memorial Trust is currently planning to add a third floor to the existing school block to enable them to take additional pupils. This will increase the total number of residential children to over 200. Consequently, additional Teaching and Care staff will also be needed to ensure the ratio of 10 children per teacher is maintained.

There is also a need to provide more sheltered workshops for the cottage industries set up for the children after their education is finished.

The Rangammal Memorial Hospital will always need support.

Equipment and personnel:

The school is currently attempting to expand the skill range of the pupils by introducing them to computers. The difficulties involved in this are not to be underestimated, the problem of communication is the primary obstacle; the children have been taught to both Sign and read in Tamil, to a standard that will permit them to lead a relatively normal life within the scope of their village backgrounds. However, Tamil does not include computer related words and most computer software is in English; also the concepts involved in computers do not easily translate into the Tamil language.

The owners of 'Image Computers' in Tiruvannamalai have volunteered their services to the school to help to educate the children, but they face an uphill task. They are currently trying to formulate a programme that will help deaf children to understand how computers work and how to operate them. There is also a plan by the school to employ a teacher who can teach the children English sign language. If anyone knows of any software or scheme that can help in this area then

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How You Can Help

please get in touch as soon as possible. There is also a need for more and better computer equipment; the school has very limited funds for this area and computer equipment is still expensive in India.

Life for these children:

Those of you who have visited India will know the future that usually faces disabled children from poor families. Highly skilled and able-bodied people have the greatest difficulty in finding employment in India, more so in the rural towns, so disadvantaged people have no chance, and the streets of India are awash with disabled people begging for a living.

The children at the Rangammal Memorial School are fortunate indeed to have the love and care of the staff there; many came to the school highly disturbed and totally dejected after being rejected by their families. But by gentle and careful discipline, example, affection and opportunity, many of the disturbed children have turned into healthy enthusiastic individuals, with a great deal to offer. All they want is someone to take up the offer.

Please help if you can.

Graham

Addresses - Please do not send cash to India!

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